

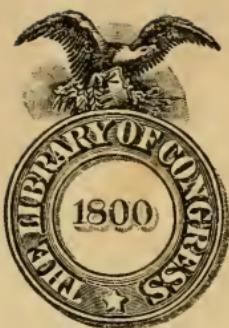
AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE
By JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

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1916





O. H. HANZETT, Chicago

James Whitcomb Riley

AN OLD SWEET- HEART OF MINE

By

JAMES WHITCOMB
RILEY



INDIANAPOLIS.
THE BOBBS-MERRILL
COMPANY: PUBLISHERS

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1916

486555
AUG 27 1942

CHARLES FRANCIS PRESS
NEW YORK

24-7-9-3

INSCRIBED

To GEORGE C. HITT

The beginning of whose steadfast friendship was marked by the first publication of these verses which now, expanded by writer, honored by publisher and masterfully graced by artist, seem to be a worthier symbol of the author's grateful and affectionate regard for his earliest friend.

Proem

*The ordered intermingling
of the real and the dream,—
The mill above the river,
and the mist above the stream;
The life of ceaseless labor,
brave with song and cheery call—
The radiant skies of evening,
with its rainbow o'er us all.*

A N OLD SWEETHEART OF
MINE!—Is this
her presence here with me,
Or but a vain creation of
a lover's memory?—
A fair, illusive vision
that would vanish into air
Dared I even touch the silence
with the whisper of a prayer?



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

NAY, let me then believe in all
the blended false and true—
The semblance of the *old* love
 and the substance of the *new*,—
The *then* of changeless sunny days—
 the *now* of shower and shine—
But Love forever smiling—
 as that old sweetheart of mine.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

T HIS ever-restful sense of *home*,
though shouts ring in the hall,—
The easy-chair—the old bookshelves
and prints along the wall;
The rare *Habanas* in their box,
or gaunt churchwarden - stem
That often wags, above the jar,
derisively at them.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

As one who cons at evening
o'er an album, all alone,
And muses on the faces
of the friends that he has known,
So I turn the leaves of fancy,
till, in shadowy design,
I find the smiling features of
An old sweetheart of mine.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

THE lamplight seems to glimmer
with a flicker of surprise,
As I turn it low—to rest me
of the dazzle in my eyes,
And light my pipe in silence,
 save a sigh that seems to yoke
Its fate with my tobacco
 and to vanish with the smoke.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

'T IS a *fragrant* retrospection,—
for the loving thoughts that start
Into being are like perfume
from the blossom of the heart;
And to dream the old dreams over
is a luxury divine—
When my truant fancies wander
with that old sweetheart of mine.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

THOUGH I hear
beneath my study,
like a fluttering of wings,
The voices of my children
and the mother as she sings—
I feel no twinge of conscience
to deny me any theme
When Care has cast her anchor
in the harbor of a dream—



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

IN fact, to speak in earnest,
I believe it adds a charm
To spice the good a trifle
 with a little dust of harm,—
For I find an extra flavor
 in Memory's mellow wine
That makes me drink the deeper
 to that old sweetheart of mine.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

O CHILDHOOD-days
enchanted!
O the magic of the Spring!—
With all green boughs
 to blossom white,
 and all bluebirds to sing!
When all the air, to toss and quaff,
 made life a jubilee
And changed the children's song
 and laugh to shrieks of ecstasy.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

WITH eyes half closed
in clouds that ooze
from lips that taste, as well,
The peppermint and cinnamon,
I hear the old School-bell,
And from "Recess" romp in again,
from "Blackman's" broken line,
To smile—behind my "lesson",
at that old sweetheart of mine.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

A FACE of lily-beauty,
with a form of airy grace,
Floats out of my tobacco
as the "Genii" from the vase;
And I thrill beneath the glances
of a pair of azure eyes
As glowing as the summer
and as tender as the skies.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE



I CAN see the pink sunbonnet
and the little, checkered dress
She wore when first I kissed her—
and she answered the caress
With the written declaration that,
“As surely as the vine
Grew 'round the stump,”
she loved me—
that old sweetheart of mine.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

A GAIN I make her presents,
in a really helpless way,—
The big “Rhode Island Greening”—
(I was hungry too, that day!)—
But I follow her from Spelling,
with her hand behind her—so—
And I slip the apple in it—
and the Teacher doesn’t know!



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE



I GIVE my *treasures* to her—all,—
my pencil—blue-and-red;—
And, if little girls played marbles,
mine should all be *hers*, instead!—
But *she* gave me her *photograph*,
and printed “Ever Thine”
Across the back—in blue-and-red—
that old sweetheart of *mine*!



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

AND again I feel the pressure
of her slender little hand,
As we used to talk together
 of the future we had planned,—
When I should be a poet,
 and with nothing else to do
But write the tender verses
 that she set the music to . . .



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE



WHEN we should live together
in a cozy little cot
Hid in a nest of roses,
 with a fairy garden-spot,
Where the vines were ever fruited
 and the weather ever fine,
And the birds were ever singing
 for that old sweetheart of mine . . .



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

WHEN I should be her lover
forever and a day,
And she my faithful sweetheart
till the golden hair was gray;
And we should be so happy
that when either's lips were dumb
They would not smile in Heaven
till the other's kiss had come.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE



BUT, ah! my dream is broken
by a step upon the stair,
And the door is softly opened,
and—my wife is standing there:
Yet with eagerness and rapture
all my visions I resign,—
To greet the *living* presence
of that old sweetheart of mine.



AN OLD SWEETHEART
OF MINE

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